



# NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND  
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

## Commerce Secretary Pritzker declares fisheries disaster for Florida oyster fishery

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U.S. Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker today declared a commercial fishery failure for the oyster fishery along the west coast of Florida. The fishery resource disaster resulted from excessive drought conditions in Apalachicola Bay and elsewhere in the Florida panhandle during the 2012 – 2013 winter fishing season.

“We understand the economic significance this historic oyster fishery has for fishermen and related businesses in the panhandle of Florida,” said Secretary Pritzker. “Because the drought caused such a decline in oyster landings and a rather significant drop in revenue, the fishery qualified as a resource disaster under the nation’s fishing law.”

Under the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the Commerce Secretary can declare a fishery disaster which makes it possible for Congress to appropriate funds to provide economic assistance to fishing businesses and communities, including oyster fishermen, affected by the disaster and to support other activities addressing the disaster.

If Congress appropriates funds to address the Florida oyster fishery failure, the Commerce Department’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will work closely with members of Congress and the state of Florida to develop a spending plan and distribute the funds to help coastal communities and the fishing industry, should funds be appropriated.

Within the last year, landings on the Florida west coast oyster fishery have declined nearly 60 percent, with a 44 percent reduction in revenues. This decline in revenues is an unusual occurrence in this fishery and is not part of a cyclical downturn in revenues. The state of Florida projects that with the continued decline in landings, revenue losses are only expected to increase and remain lower than the historical average until the oyster population begins to rebound.

“It takes three years for oysters to reach marketable size, so we are concerned about this depleted oyster resource that has traditionally supported a viable fishery,” said Sam Rauch, acting assistant NOAA administrator for [NOAA Fisheries](#). “We will continue to work with Congress, the state and oyster fishermen through this challenging time.”

NOAA’s mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth’s environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and our other [social media channels](#).